

# Focus Wild Arizona

## Key Words:

**Archaeologist:** a person who studies history by looking at what past civilizations leave behind, such as pottery and buildings

**Canal:** a ditch used to move water from one place to another

**Civilization:** a society or group of people living together at a particular time

**Origin:** the beginning

For nearly 1,000 years, the Hohokam Indians were the major **civilization** in central Arizona. An estimated population of 50,000 lived along the Salt and Gila rivers. The Hohokam developed extensive **canals** to take water from these rivers and grow many crops in the desert.

Unfortunately, during the middle of the 15th century before European explorers arrived in the area, this civilization disappeared. Their descendants, known as the Pima Indians, continue some of their traditions. We find remains of some Hohokam cities in places such as the Casa Grande Ruins National Monument in Coolidge, Ariz., and the Pueblo Grande Museum in Phoenix. But most of this unique culture was lost.

Seventy-five years ago, however, **archaeologists** made an exciting discovery. On the edge of the Gila River, near where Interstate 10 now runs, they

found the remains of a long-forgotten Hohokam town. This town was once a bustling center of Native American life, with about 1,000 people. Today, dry canals and pottery shards are about all that is left. However, this town has provided a lot of information about Hohokam culture. It is so important that it has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is closed to the public to prevent damage or vandalism.

For a wildlife enthusiast, one of the more interesting parts of this story is the town's name. The Pima call it "Skoaquick," which translates to "Place of the Snakes." Today, it is more commonly referred to as "Snaketown." You

might think it was named that simply because it was in the desert, and many kinds of snakes live in the desert. However, there is more to the story.

The Hohokam used to dispose of their trash in large mounds scattered around the area. At Snaketown, archaeologists found approximately 60 of these trash mounds. One story says that when the town was "rediscovered" in 1934, many rats were living in these mounds. Rats are a primary food source for rattlesnakes, which also were present in great numbers when archaeologists began studying the town. Thus, the town may have been named for the unusually large population of rattlesnakes nearby.



ILLUSTRATION BY TRACY HILL



By Eric Proctor

Snaketown is not alone. Every place has a story to tell. In Arizona, those stories often involve animals. Many Arizona towns and landmarks were named after wildlife. Often, their names give us some kind of hint as to their history.

Map It:

Here is a partial list of Arizona locations that have been named after wildlife. Using a map of Arizona, try to locate each place. To help in your search, we provide the county in which each one can be found. In addition, locate the city in which you live. Use a ruler and the map scale to determine how many miles each of the locations is from your city. Write this mileage on the space provided.

Location	Distance from your city
Bear Canyon Lake (Coconino County)	_____
Turkey Flat (Graham County)	_____
Vulture Mountains (Maricopa County)	_____
Wet Beaver Creek (Yavapai County)	_____
Wolf Hole (Mohave County)	_____

Search the map for additional locations that appear to be named after wildlife. Write down at least three that you discover.

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With the help of a parent, use reference books or the Internet and try to determine the **origins** of the name for at least one of these locations. Why was it named for wildlife? Write down what you learn below.

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Just for Fun:

Think of some place where you live or have lived. It can be a specific house, a city or maybe even a street. Think about your experiences at this place. Do you remember any animals? Perhaps you set out a bird feeder and watched the finches, or followed a trail of ants carrying food to an anthill. Maybe you remember javelina knocking over trash cans, or bees pollinating the flowers. If you could give this place a new wildlife-related name, what would it be? Why? On a piece of paper, write down the new name and briefly tell its story. Feel free to draw a picture. 🦋



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY CECELIA CARPENTER

■ This feature is part of the Arizona Game and Fish Department’s Focus Wild Arizona program, a free educational program for teachers, parents, students or anyone interested in learning about wildlife and habitat. Visit our Web site, [www.azgfd.gov/focuswild](http://www.azgfd.gov/focuswild), to find exciting lessons and resources.